Being Knowledgeable Through The Light of Knowledge

Alireza Rahimiyan[1]

Abstract: *The book "**Masalah-e-Ilm**" explores is an analytical study of the ontological and epistemological aspect of the reality of knowledge. The author in this work attempts to examine and compare the most significant perspectives of Transcendent Philosophy (*al-Hikmat al-Muta'aliya*) and Shia narrational knowledge.To this end, after explaining knowledge in Mulla Sadra's philosophy and the teachings of the Ahl-e-Bait (a.s.), it analyses the views of Mirza Mahdi Isfahani (r.a.) and his unique interpretations of traditions, addressing some of the critics' objections. The present text offers passages from the second section, reflecting Mirza Isfahani's explorations on this subject.*

Key words: muzlim al-zaat, light of knowledge" (noor al-ilm), Masalah-e-Ilm, Mirza Mahdi Isfahani.

[1] Author and Teacher of Islamic Sciences, Ph. D. in Islamic Sciences

Mirza Mahdi Isfahani (r.a.) asserts that none of the perfections and attributes of humans, such as knowledge and power, are intrinsic to them; knowledge is conferred and taken away (by Allah) and is radiant and luminous in its essence. The discovery of humans of themselves and of inherently dark objects (i.e. the quiddities) by them transpires through knowledge granted by Allah. The criterion for this possession is the awareness of being knowledgeable, rather than attachment to a specific known object; although, when it does attach to a known object, Mirza Mahdi Isfahani refers to it as “that by which the discovery occurs” (*ma bihi al-kashf*). The essence of the light of knowledge does not have degrees, but the possession of it does. Furthermore, there is no necessary correlation between the intensity of possessing the light of knowledge and the multiplicity of known objects. In Mirza’s view, the essence of a human becomes illuminated by possessing knowledge, rather than the inherently dark nature of the essence being transformed into light.

The most evident fact in human consciousness for any knowledgeable person is that he findshimself as "**knowing**" certain things. The first step in analysing this self-evident truth is to clarify what is meant by the “**essence**” and “**quiddity**”(*maahiyyat*) of each person.

The Inherently Dark Nature (*muzlim al-zaat*) of Human Quiddity

When we speak of the “essence” and “quiddity” of a human being, theories from various philosophical schools should not come to our minds. The only correct method for understanding the intrinsic qualities of a human is for each person to introspectively examine himself to see what characteristics pertain to that which he refers to as "I." Every human possesses multiple attributes and carries various qualities. He must discern, among all these attributes, which ones pertain to his essence and quiddity; in

other words, which qualities belong to the very "I," insofar as it is "I." The essence and quiddity of a human refer to nothing other than what is consciously indicated by the term “I.”[1]

The question is: which attributes are intrinsic to the “I”? In other words, what qualities do I possess when I consider myessence and quiddity? For instance, I have the power to perform certain actions; is this power intrinsic to my essence? I have knowledge of certain things; is this knowledge inherent to my essence? This question can similarly be raised regarding all other perfections.

The simple answer that can be intuitively given to these questions is that none of these attributes are intrinsic to the "I." I am not inherently capable, and I can realistically conceive of myself being devoid of any power. The supposition of the absence of power from “I” does not lead to a contradiction; therefore, no power is intrinsic to "I." Similarly, none of my knowledge is intrinsic to "I."It is entirely reasonable and possible to assume that “I” could become ignorant of everything I currently know, without this leading to a contradiction; the same holds for the other perfections that “I” possess. Sometimes, when I lose certain powers or knowledge, I still find that I am "I," and the diminishment of my perfections does not affect my being "I." I find myself as "human." Humanity is the collection of perfections I perceive within myself. However, my humanity is not intrinsic to "I," as I can conceive of all these perfections being removed from “I” without leading to a

[1]From the beginning of the discussion, we remind that those familiar with philosophical terms and schools should not interpret these expressions in terms of primacy of existence (*asaalat al-wujud*) or primacy of quiddity (*asaalat al-maahiyyah*). Rather, they should set aside all technical terms and focus solely on what they directly experience/realize in order to gradually understand our intended meaning.

contradiction. It is possible for “I” to exist without being human. This supposition is entirely reasonable—that a person, through a particular event, may no longer find himself as human, that is, as possessing human perfections. Consider an example of this in the Holy Quran,

“**And you surely knew of those among you who transgressed in the matter of the Sabbath, so We said to them, ‘Be apes, despised’**.[1]”

The transformation of a human into an ape precisely means that the individual, who yesterday identified himself as “**human**”, now identifies himself as an “**ape**”. Here, the “I” has not changed; if the “I” itself had transformed and ceased to be "I," we could not say that a human became an ape. The continuity in this transformation is maintained by the "I." The “I” remains constant in both states; what has changed are the perfections and attributes of the "I." When we say that humanity is not intrinsic to the "I," this is exactly what we mean.

Similarly, if transformations occur in my body or soul, the core “I” does not change. In psychological terms or common parlance, one might say that this person has changed and is no longer the same person. However, from a precise introspective perspective, one must say that the essence of the current person has not differed from the previous person. If the essence had changed, we could not accurately say that this person has changed. We can only say that a knowledgeable person became ignorant, or an ignorant person became knowledgeable, when the person's essence remains constant in both states. “I”, who have become knowledgeable now, am the same person who was earlier ignorant. "I," who was once ignorant, have become knowledgeable. If the “I” in my state of ignorance were different from the “I”

[1]Surah Baqarah (2): Verse 65

in my state of knowledge, I could no longer say that “I” have become knowledgeable. All of these are intuitive insights that any rational person can affirm. Given these points, one can conclude that none of my perfections are intrinsic to me, because "I," when considering my quiddity, possess none of these qualities. All of them exist outside my quiddity, and I clearly perceive their distinctness from myself.

Therefore, we can identify only one characteristic as intrinsic to the "I," which is the poverty and lack of self-sufficiency in "I." The fact that “I” possess no perfection inherently and that everything I have is “conferred by another” is the only intrinsic quality of "I." We refer to this reality as the "intrinsic poverty" of "I." When we say “a knowledgeable human is intrinsically destitute” it means that a knowledgeable human, while perceiving himself as human and knowledgeable, if he introspectively considers the perfections of humanity, knowledge, and other qualities, finds none of these as identical with himself or as coming from himself. He can conceive, without contradiction, that he may no longer be human or knowledgeable, and yet “I” does not become “not I”. "I," the human, may cease to be human, or "I," the knowledgeable, may become ignorant; however, in all these scenarios, the “I”-ness of “I” remains unchanged.

We refer to this characteristic—the only intrinsic quality of the “I”—as the "inherent darkness" (*zulmani al-zaat*) of "I." When it is said that essences are inherently dark, it means that what each person recognizes as "I," "you," or "they" inherently possesses no perfection of its own, and whatever it has is "from another” which can be taken away anytime (by the conferrer).

Acknowledging and admitting this truth is the key to unlocking the doors of guidance for humanity. Mirza Mahdi Isfahani (r.a.) states at the beginning of his book**Abwab al-Huda**:

"To open the doors, one must seek the key, and the key to the doors is one: the key to the doors of guidance is to know the self with the new knowledge descended from the heavens, in contrast to the ancient Greek human knowledge born of thoughts and woven theories.[1]"

He believes that this type of self-knowledge in humans is achieved through the guidance and reminders of the divine Prophets and their successors (a.s.) and stands in stark contrast to what was conceived in ancient Greek philosophy. By studying his explanation, one can see that this understanding of the human self is entirely different from what exists in the words of Greek philosophers and their followers—both Muslim and non-Muslim. Mirza's words appear novel and surprising to the followers of Plato and Aristotle, and the criticisms they have levelled against his views bear witness to this reality. His exact words on self-knowledge are as follows:

"The self of man implies his reality and his essence depicted by the expression "I"and "the created being shadow" (*al-zill al-haadis al-kaaen*) and when it takes a form, it is 'reflection' (*shabah*); when it finds life and consciousness, it is called 'spirit' (*nafs*); and when it embodies in a body, it is called 'human' (*insan*). It is as defined by the Legislator (Allah) through remembrance, in that it is something inherently dark, existing through another, created yet enduring. Thus, it inherently lacks any essence of its own, like a shadow—it is something that exists through another, lacking external light.[2]"

[1]Abwaab al-Huda, Mirza Mahdi Isfahani (r.a.), p. 3

[2]Ibid.

According to these explanations, the reality of a human—or their spirit[1]—is the very essence referred to as "I" or "self". This human soul (the "I") possesses nothing inherently from its own essence, and for this reason, it acquires various perfections. This essence takes on different names depending on the qualities and attributes it attains. If it takes on a specific form, it is called "shadow" (*shabah*); if it gains life and consciousness, it is referred to as "spirit" (*ruh*); and if it adopts a physical body and has a corporeal form, it is named "human".

The intention here is not to suggest that the "I" (*ana*) has no fixed essence and takes on a specific form and essence at each moment (like what mystics and philosophers claim about true existence, saying that it appears in a different and deceptive form (*but-e-ayyaar*) at every moment[2]).

---

[1]Here, and in similar contexts, the term **nafs** (self) is intended in its literal sense, which in English to "self." The aim is to indicate that the true "self" of a human is that which is referred to by the word "I" or *ana* ("self" here is synonymous with "essence/quiddity"). In the discussions that follow, another meaning of the term nafs will be introduced, which is fully related to the first meaning yet distinct from it.

[2]This perspective finds ample evidence in the words and poetry of mystics who believe in the doctrine of *wahdat al-wujud* (the unity of existence or monism). Jalaluddin Rumi expresses this idea in the *Divan-e Shams Tabrizi*:

I am both the passionate lover and the beautiful beloved,
I am both hell and the fire, I am both paradise and its maidens.
I am both this world and the hereafter, I am both paradise and the Tuba tree,
I am both mountain and desert, I am both the deaf and the blind.
Hidden in both place and placelessness, yet manifest,
I am both the master of this world and the ruler of the hereafter.
I am human and jinn, like a demon I am in this world,
For the Mount of Love, I must also be the white hand (yad-e-bayzaa) of Moses.

Such an idea is certainly not what Mirza Isfahani (r.a.) intends; rather, he implies the attainment of different states by this essence. The perfections of this fixed essence vary according to each form of attainment, and each type of attainment has its own distinct name. In each of these states, it gains the suitability to carry a specific predicate. For instance, if it attains life and consciousness, it is referred to as "spirit," and we say, "I am spirit." If, in addition to life and consciousness, it possesses a physical body, it is called "human," and we say, "I am human." What remains constant and enduring through all these transformations[1] is the same essence/quiddity or “I” (*ana*).

Thus, none of (the states of) having a soul, having a body, or having a specific form are intrinsic to the “I”; the true “I” is distinct from all of these. Certainly, we experience all of this while possessing both a body and a soul, but the precise point here is that when a person who has a soul and a body contemplates on his own essence, he finds that “I” (what he refers to as "self") is distinct from the soul, body, and all the perfections he possesses. Instead, he sees the “I” as inherently impoverished and, as the term suggests, inherently dark (*zulmaani al-zaat*). The phrase “it is inherently lacking for its own essence” highlights this very subtle and precise point: the “I” does not perceive any of its possessions as identical to itself or intrinsic to its essence. In other words, “I” is inherently devoid of everything that I currently have or may have in the future.

The term “having or possessing” is the English equivalent of *mālikiyyat* (ownership) or *wajediyyat* (finding), frequently used by Mirza

[1]The term *tatawwur* (transformation) for essence/quiddity in this discussion does not imply the same meaning as used by mystics who believe in *wahdat al-wujud* (the unity of existence/monism).

Isfahani (r.a.), following the traditions of the Ahl-e-Bait (a.s.). All these expressions indicate that the attributes and perfections of human essence (“I”) are not intrinsic. We will now refer to some narrative evidence on this topic.

With these explanations, the reason for calling the “I” as "shadow" (*zill*) becomes clear. A shadow exists because it depends on something else; it has no existence of its own. The concept of “inherent lack of essence” precisely points to this subtle idea that the essence (that is, the “I”) has no independent reality when considered, but rather is a “thing through another.” The similarity between the “I” and a shadow lies in this “thingness through another”. If “I” am a form (*shabah*), it is through another that I get a form; if I am a human, it is through another that I am human. All the "I's" attributes and qualities follow this same rule and are not intrinsic to it. Therefore, the essence of “I” is neither human, nor body, nor soul, nor a combination of these. Instead, all these names apply because the “I” has attained them. In all these states, the “I” remains constant. None of these attributes change its essence; rather, as the Imams (a.s.) have expressed, it is the ownership or possession of the “I” that has changed.

To clarify this discussion further, let us refer to the most fundamental possession of the "I," which is my “existence”. The difference between existence and my other possessions is that if existence is removed from "I," nothing remains as "I," and consequently, “I” cannot be aware of my own non-existence. “I” can only speak of myself if I "exist"; if I do not exist, there is no “I” to perceive. However, this does not alter the reality of the matter. If “I” lose existence, then I no longer am, and I have no awareness of myself[1].

[1]The intention here is not to suggest that my existence is equivalent or identical to my self-awareness, or even that it is a sufficient condition for it. Rather, it is conceivable that something could exist without having any awareness of itself or others.

Likewise, others, if they do not have existence, have no awareness of their quiddity/essence and cannot speak of it. Yet none of this proves that “I” is equivalent to “existence” (*wujud*).

When we say, “I am I” and when we say, “I exist”, we intend two completely different meanings. If the equation “I = existence” were true, we would understand the same meaning from both phrases. However, any rational listener realizes that these two statements convey two different concepts. “I am I” is a tautological statement (identity) and, like any other tautology, is always true.The sentence "A is A," regardless of the meaning intended by "A," is always true, because it is a tautology, or repetition of the same concept, where both the subject and predicate carry the same meaning. In the sentence "I exist," however, “I” has one meaning, and "existence" another. The person who says this intends to mean "I am," which has a completely distinct meaning from "I am I." Intuitively, these two sentences convey different meanings, and for this reason, we cannot use them interchangeably.

To further understand the difference, let’s consider the negation of each of these sentences. The negation of “I am I” is “I am not I”. This is a clear contradiction and always holds a false value in propositional logic, as the statement “A is not A” is always false. However, the negation of the second sentence is “I do not exist”[1]. This statement is in no way

[1]By stating this sentence, we do not provide any introspective report on the essence of "I," because no one can ever truly perceive their own non-existence. If we want to give an account of an introspective truth, we should say, "I could possibly not exist." This is the intended meaning of the phrase in the text, but to preserve the logical form of the negation of "I exist," it has been presented in this way.

contradictory, as the assumption of the non-existence of “I” is a completely reasonable assumption.

It is conceivable that “I” could cease to exist by losing all possessions and qualities; in that case, nothing could be said about "I," as there would be no awareness of it left. Yet, this assumption is by no means impossible. Therefore, we can conclude that the essence of “I” is not identical to existence or being.

Illumination of Human Essence by the Light of Knowledge

We have taken the first step, which involved the introspective recognition of ourselves—as knowledgeable beings—and realized that the essence of humanity is inherently dark and impoverished; therefore, all its perfections come from another (viz. Allah). Now, we must take the second step to understand how this inherently dark self becomes knowledgeable.

There is no doubt in this truth that, in certain cases, a person finds himself to be knowledgeable and genuinely attributes the quality of knowledge to himself. Other human perfections, such as being capable and alive, are similar in this regard.

As stated, none of these attributes are intrinsic to human beings; rather, all are attributed to humans through another (i.e., *bil-ghayr*). However, these attributions are not metaphorical. For example, “I” truly find myself to be knowledgeable, capable, and alive, and I see no metaphor in ascribing these perfections to myself. This contrasts with Mulla Sadra’s philosophy, where attributing any existential perfection to “essence/quiddity” (*maahiyyah*) is considered metaphorical, not real. The expression used in the tradition of the Ahl-e-Bait (a.s.) for such attribution, which the late Mirza Isfahani also repeatedly emphasized in his teachings, is termed as “granting

of kingdom" (*tamleek*). In the exegesis of "There is no power and strength except from Allah" (لا حول و لا قوة الا بالله), it has been narrated on the authority of Ameerul Momineen Ali Ibn Abi Talib (a.s.)

"*Indeed, we possess nothing alongside Allah, and we possess only what He grants us. Whenever He grants us something of which He has greater ownership than we do, He obligates us with it; and whenever He takes it from us, He lifts the obligation from us.*[1]"

The statement of Imam (a.s.) is very clear and expressive. He begins by saying that our ownership is not parallel to Allah's ownership; that is, we cannot say, for example, that Allah is powerful and that we are also powerful alongside Him. Rather, we only possess what He has granted to us. Furthermore, whatever He grants us, He enjoys greater ownership over it; in other words, by endowing perfections to His creations, nothing is diminished from Allah's ownership over these perfections.

In this granting of ownership, Allah is the One Who grants ownership. We humans and other creations are the owners in this endowment, and our 'ownership' refers to the perfections we attain. In this granting, Allah's greater ownership remains intact. In the terminology of the Ahl-e-Bait (a.s.), a human becoming knowledgeable means possessing 'knowledge', becoming capable means possessing 'power', and becoming alive means possessing 'life'. What is essential in this discussion is that 'knowledge','power', and 'life' are not creations of the same nature as humans. None of these are inherently dark; rather, in Mirza Isfahani's (r.a.) terms, they are inherently luminous and radiant.

[1]Nahj al-Balaaghah, Hikmah 404

The explanation of this expression varies for each of these "lights." Since the current discussion is about "knowledge," we will attempt to clarify the inherently luminous and radiant nature of knowledge through introspective observations. In this exploration, we will draw upon the guidance provided by the traditions of the immaculate and pure Ahl-e-Bait (a.s.).

The simplest way to awaken to the existence of the light of knowledge is through a renewed reflection on our self-awareness. With the reminders provided in the previous chapter about the inherently obscure nature of human essence, it was clearly demonstrated that "I," while being knowledgeable and capable, perceive my true self as something distinct from knowledge and power. When I refer to “I” with an inner sense, I see it as inherently devoid of any perfections, including knowledge. Therefore, every rational person can say, "I discover myself." This discovery or self-awareness is, in fact, knowledge of oneself. Hence, every rational person has knowledge of their essence/quiddity, and in reality, their essence and nature are known to them; “I” am both the knower and the known.

Now, the question arises: how can an inherently dark nature be known to itself? If it is devoid of any perfections, including knowledge, then its awareness of itself is not intrinsic to it. This knowledge cannot emerge from its inherently obscure essence. Therefore, a light external to its essence, which is not of the same nature, has made its essence known to itself. If there were no light, the inherently dark nature would never gain self-awareness. Since such awareness exists, we can understand that there is a creature that is not inherently dark, which we refer to as possessing an enlightened essence; we call this the “**light of knowledge**” (*noor al-ilm*).

Since this light is not intrinsic to the human essence, it does not necessarily always exist with man but can appear or disappear at times. The

presence or absence of this light of knowledge essentially governs whether the "I" possesses it or not[1]. No human constantly possesses this light in all states. For example, in a state of coma, one does not have awareness of their essence and, therefore, lacks the light of knowledge to rediscover himself through inner reflection. Similarly, in sleep, aside from rare and exceptional cases, a person does not recognize himself and lacks the light of knowledge. The presence or absence of self-awareness serves as a very clear testimony to the fact that this knowledge is not intrinsic to the human being but rather originates from a created being with an enlightened essence, which we call the **light of knowledge**.

Thus, it becomes clear that to be aware of the closest thing to us—namely, our own essence/quiddity —we require a light that is distinct from us and does not originate from us. Since I know myself not through myself but through the light of knowledge, which is outside and separate from my essence, we can extend this understanding to our knowledge of other inherently dark creatures as well. If we were left with only ourselves and other inherently obscure creatures (of which we are also of the same genus and species), we would not have any knowledge of any of them.

We can conclude about other human beings that, like us, they are inherently obscure in essence, as they, too, **find** within themselves this same inner awareness and see themselves as inherently lacking in knowledge and consciousness. Therefore, the reality and essence of other humans are also inherently dark. Of course, we do not generally perceive the essence of others with the same inner clarity with which we perceive our own essence.

[1]It should be noted that these statements should be regarded more as a reminder for realization (*tanabboh-e-wijdaani*) than as formal argument or reasoning. This is clearly observed in the text itself.

However, when they report their own inner experiences, we find these accounts align with our own inner awareness of ourselves and our attributes, allowing us to understand that if others know their essence, it is through the grace of an external light of knowledge.

Therefore, by extension, we can understand that our knowledge of others is also mediated by this **light of knowledge**. If their essence were not inherently obscure like ours, and they were beings of light, fundamentally different from us, they would not perceive their own essence as dark and lacking the light of knowledge and consciousness. Now, since their awareness of themselves is due to a light external to their essence, it follows that our knowledge of them does not originate from their inherently dark nature—as evidenced by their own awareness—but rather, we come to know them through the mediation of the light of knowledge.

This explanation applies to rational creatures like humans, who possess self-awareness and knowledge of themselves. We recognize them as inherently dark in essence, according to their own inner awareness. Therefore, we attribute our knowledge of them to the light of knowledge. This concept is even easier to affirm regarding non-rational creatures, which lack awareness and understanding of their true nature.

Many of the beings we recognize around us are fundamentally devoid of knowledge and awareness.We consider inanimate objects to lack knowledge and awareness; at the very least, we are certain that they do not possess the knowledge and awareness that we experience. Similarly, we regard plants as devoid of knowledge and awareness. As for animals, although we acknowledge that they have some degree of understanding and awareness, we certainly do not consider them to be inherently luminous in essence. If an animal's reality were luminous in essence, its essence would be synonymous with consciousness and knowledge, and thus it would lack

ignorance, negligence, and forgetfulness concerning itself.We do not have a clear inner realization of the essence of an animal as we do with our own essence, yet the belief that an animal's essence is pure understanding and consciousness is, honestly, far from reason. If this were the case, it would not lack intellect. How could one conceive of a luminous and radiant being that lacks reason? We understand the difference between humans and animals as being rooted in intellect. When the human, who is superior to the animal, is inherently dark in essence, how could an animal without intellect be inherently luminous?

From all these explanations, it becomes clear that the beings around us—whether human, animal, plant, or inanimate object—are all inherently dark in essence, and none of them are identical to consciousness or knowledge. We ourselves, who come to know them, are also dark in essence. Therefore, our knowledge of these beings must come through a creation that is distinct from both us and them, a creation that is not inherently dark like us and them. Our knowledge of them does not come from ourselves or from them, but rather we perceive them through something else, which we refer to as the "**means of disclosure**" (*mabehi al-kashf*). The best expression and explanation for the light of knowledge is precisely this "**means of disclosure**."

This light is "**self-apparent and that makes other things apparent**" (*ẓaahirun bi-zaatehiwamuẓhirun le-ghayrehi*); that is, it does not require anything else to be known, but it allows us to know all inherently dark things through it. Thus, our knowledge of the light of knowledge itself is not like what we described about inherently dark creations, because what enables any knowledge or disclosure cannot itself be disclosed in the manner of inherently dark essences. Our awareness of this luminous creation cannot be

explained through the mechanism we discussed regarding dark essences, and we will address it further in its proper place.

Paying attention to this concept, we can say that a person's "**known things**" (*maaloomaat*) in their entirety are inherently dark in essence. These known things are the very essences that are revealed through the light of knowledge[1].Therefore, the light of knowledge is not called the **known thing** (*maaloom*), even though we are not ignorant of it.

We discover all our known things through this light, yet we cannot consider this light itself as "**uncovered thing** (*makshoof*)". Rather, it is the very essence of revelation and illumination, or more precisely, it is the *means of disclosure and manifestation* (*maa behi al-kashf wa- al-ẓuhur*). Please pay attentionto one of the statements from Mirza Mahdi Isfahani (r.a.), who pointed out this very concept:

"*A person knows his known things (maaloomaat) in that their essence is inherently dark, not luminous or self-revealing, let alone uncovering other things... Thus, the insightful individual realizes that what uncovers the known things is something other than his own essence. He realizes that the revealed nature of these things is not by themselves, for their essence is inherently*

[1]It should be noted that the meaning of this expression is entirely different from its usual usage in philosophical discourse. Philosophers typically use "**known things**" (*maaloomaat*) to refer to the mental concepts and representations of external essences, while in our usage, we refer to the essences themselves (which, of course, include ourselves) as the known things. We consider these essences to be directly manifested by the light of knowledge, whereas philosophers in ***acquired knowledge*** (*ilm-e-ḥuṣuli*) refer to external essences as "**knowledge of the accidents**" (*maaloomaat bi- al-araz*) and regard the actual or intrinsic known things as their mental images.

dark, lacking both self-manifestation and the ability to manifest others. Consequently, he understands that the entity that is self-manifesting and uncovering them is the light of knowledge[1].”

The first inner realization pointed out in these statements is that a person’s known things—that is, the external entities he knows, including himself, other humans, animals, plants, and inanimate objects—none of them have an inherently luminous essence, nor do they possess intrinsic knowledge of themselves. As Mirza Mahdi Isfahani (r.a.) expressed, he does not have the ability to uncover himself. Every person, first with respect to his own essence and then, with the explanations provided, regarding other creatures, understands this reality. Thus, since he lacks intrinsic self-revelation and knowshimself only through something external—i.e. the light of knowledge—they are certainly not revealing of others. Therefore, the essence of none of these beings is inherently luminous.

To support this statement for those who are accustomed to various types of philosophical reasoning, we can present the following argument: The capacity to uncover (*kashifiyyah*) is not intrinsic to the knower, and if being uncovered (*makshoofiyyah*) is also not intrinsic to the known things, then there must be a revealer other than the two (knower and known) through which “disclosure” is actualized. The revealing capacity of this *kashif* or *maabehi al-kashf* must be inherent to it; otherwise, another revealer or *maabehi al-kashf* would be needed, which would lead to a second revealer, and this would continue until we arrive at an intrinsically revealing entity that is itself pure disclosure (or has intrinsic disclosure). This is the sought conclusion.

[1]Maarif-e-Kabir, p. 133 by Mirza Mahdi isfahani (r.a.)

Setting aside all these statements, which carry a rational and argumentative tone, Mirza Mahdi (r.a.) considers the path to inner realization of the inherently luminous nature of knowledge to be as follows:

"*In the pursuit of awareness, it is necessary to use analogies to bring clarity to those who may not find such awareness themselves and to dispel their heedlessness. So, we say: if the light of the sun had no night, its recognition would be impossible due to its constant and intense radiance and its subtlety compared to illuminated objects. Similarly, the light of knowledge is such that when a person lacks awareness and knowledge (such as during the "sleep" of the heart), they do not perceive themselves or anything else. But when awareness returns, they perceive that there is a light between themselves and their intelligible objects—a lamp that illuminates the way between them and these objects. Once this recognition occurs, one must look through this light towards it and witness it as a purely immaterial light, one whose essence is pure illumination. Through this, one understands that it is the true nature of knowledge, both of itself and of other things, and that it is, in its essence, the reality of awareness and the very core of understanding*.[1]"

According to the analogy of Mirza Mahdi Isfahani (r.a.), if a person did not experience states of ignorance or heedlessness, they might not be reminded of the light of knowledge. In his terminology, *qalb* (heart) is, as per the usage in the Holy Quran and Sunnah, synonymous with the "soul". The awakening of the soul is marked by understanding and awareness, while its sleep is marked by heedlessness, ignorance, forgetfulness, and similar states. These states in humans, all of which are examples of a lack of knowledge, serve as a good reminder to reflect upon the light of knowledge that acts as

[1]Abwaab al-Huda, Mirza Mahdi Isfahani (r.a.), p. 33, Beginning of the Sixteenth Chapter

an intermediary between oneself and one's *maaloomaat* (known things) and *maaqoolaat* (intelligible objects) when one becomes knowledgeable and aware; this is a subjective focus (*naẓar-e-mauzuee*), not an instrumental one (*naẓar-e-aali*).

In our state of knowing, we humans generally have an instrumental view of the light of knowledge. However, if we can shift to a subjective view of knowledge—where the light of knowledge becomes the "focus of attention" (*manẓoorunilaih*), not merely a means of knowing (*manẓoorbehi*)—then we will truly recognize its essence. It should be noted that it is impossible for the light of knowledge to become known to us like inherently dark essences. That which enables all understanding and knowledge cannot itself become the object of understanding and knowledge. Mirza Mahdi (r.a.) thoughtfully pointed out this subtle truth in his further statements.

"*And one finds in it (the light of knowledge) another perfection: that it is free from becoming manifested, revealed, known, or conceptualized. This is because one realizes that its very essence is to manifest and disclose. Thus, its essence is inherently contradictory to becoming an object or effect*.[1]"

Something, whose essence is to manifest and reveal, cannot itself become an object of manifestation or disclosure. For philosophers who find these statements difficult to digest, let them consider the words of Ṣadr al-Deen Shirazi (aka Mulla Sadra):

"Because theknowledge is the one that uncovers the things, so how can any other thing uncover it? Otherwise, the thing whose essence is to uncover things will become the uncovered thing in its accident. It cannot be

[1]Ibid., pp. 33-34

an absolute discloser but only partially so, as natural intellect itself testifies... Knowledge is complete discovery, and it is discovery itself... What is meant here is not the action of uncovering itself, but rather that through which disclosure occurs.[1]"

What we have quoted from **Mafaateeḥ al-Ghaib**are not entirely MullaṢadra'swords; we will present other parts of it as we continue the discussion to show that he did not remain faithful to what is self-evident and intuitive. Due to mixing it with intellectual and theoretical discussions—views that are deemed invalid—he extended beyond the realm of intuitive self-evidence.

In any case, Mirza Mahdi Isfahani (r.a.), following the teachings of the Ahl-e-Bait (a.s.), views the true essence of knowledge as a luminous existence, distinct in nature from both the knower and the known. The knower and the known are inherently dark in essence, while knowledge itself is a light, with its luminosity being intrinsic. To clarify the origin of knowledge's luminosity as drawn from the sayings of the Ahl-e-Bait (a.s.), we will reference some examples related to this concept:

From Amirul Momineen Imam Ali (a.s.), in a sermon where he describes knowledge and scholars, it is narrated as follows:

"*People are of three kinds: a divine scholar, a seeker of knowledge on the path of salvation, and the ignorant rabble who follow every speaker and incline towards every wind. They don't seek brightnesswith* ***the light of knowledge.***"

[1]Mafaateeh al-Ghaib, Mulla Sadra, p. 261

The expression "the light of knowledge" (*noor al-ilm*) in this noble narration is used in the form of an explanatory annexation (*izaafah-e-bayaaniyya*), meaning it refers to a light that is, in essence, knowledge itself.

Imam Sadeq (a.s.), in his narration addressed to Unwan al-Baṣri, said the following:

"*Knowledge is not acquired through learning; rather, it is a light that Allah, Blessed and Exalted, places in the heart of whom He wills to guide*.[1]"

According to this statement, knowledge is not a product of learning, nor can it be said that learning necessarily results in knowledge. Rather, the true nature of knowledge is nothing other than a light that Allah places in the hearts of those whom He wishes to guide. Therefore, it is Allah who bestows the light of knowledge, granting it according to His will and decree to those He chooses. This explanation precisely illuminates Mirza Isfahani's (r.a.) stance on the nature of knowledge and its bestowal.

Explaining the concept of the Throne, Amirul Momineen Ali (a.s.) says:

"*Indeed, Allah, the Exalted, created the Throne from four lights... and it is the knowledge that Allah entrusted to the bearers (of the Throne). That is a light from His Greatness; through His Greatness and His Light, the hearts of the believers gain insight*.[2]"

[1]Behaar al-Anwaar by Allamah Majlisi (r.a.), vol. 1, p 225

[2]Al-Kafi by Shaikh Kulaini (r.a.), vol. 1, Kitab al-Tauheed, Baab al-Arsh wa al-Kursi, H. 1

It should be noted, as the Imam (a.s.) himself has clarified, that the light of knowledge—referred to here as the Divine Throne (*Arsh*)—is a creation of Allah. Likewise, the Majesty of Allah, whatever it may entail, is certainly something distinct from the Divine Essence and is also His creation. In this noble narration, the entrusting of the light of knowledge is another expression for**granting of ownership** (*tamleek*), which we discussed earlier.

Now, let us see what Mirza Mahdi Isfahani (r.a.) says about the essence of knowledge relying on such narrations:

"*Anyone, after being ignorant of something and lacking that light, finds a light that reveals that thing. This light is knowledge, and through it, one recognizes what they were previously ignorant of. This manifesting quality is intrinsic to the light of knowledge, as its brightness is used to dispel ignorance of something. In such a state, the knower is not unaware of the light of knowledge; however, due to focusing on the known objects, the light of knowledge becomes veiled from them. At that moment, if they turn their focus on the light itself—taking a subjective view—and shift their attention away from the known, they attain a true inner awareness and recognition of the light itself.*[1]"

It is observed that Mirza Isfahani (r.a.) uses the same approach to awaken awareness of the light of knowledge as previously mentioned—by comparing the state of knowing to the state of ignorance. When a person lacks something and then attains it, they are more keenly aware of what they have gained through this change in state. Thus, in raising awareness of the light of knowledge, he says, "after ignorance of something."

[1]Abwab al-Huda, Mirza Mahdi Isfahani (r.a.), p. 21

Another subtle point here, which we will only mention briefly, is that the light of knowledge discussed here pertains entirely to creation. The concept of possessing and attaining the light of knowledge applies within the realm of created beings. All discussions related to the light of knowledge concern how inherently dark beings acquire knowledge, with the shared characteristic among all these created beings being that knowledge in them is "**preceded by non-existence (created)**" (*haadis*). Therefore, any knowledge within a creature assumes the possibility of prior ignorance.

The important conclusion here is that we do not have the right to extend discussions of the light of knowledge to the Divine Essence or explain the Creator's knowledge of creation through this same light of knowledge. Doing so is a fundamental and dangerous mistake, one that philosophers often fall into. They, in their view, limit knowledge to acquired knowledge (*ilmhusuli*) and innate knowledge (*ilmhuzuri*)—a classification we have shown to be problematic from various respects—and thereby regard the knowledge of the Divine as innate. They permit themselves to discuss the nature of the Creator's knowledge in this way. However, in our discussion of the light of knowledge, we must avoid such an error.

Another important point regarding the right to recognize the light of knowledge is that this recognition occurs when a person focuses on the light of knowledge itself, regardless of the things illuminated by it (*maaloomaat*). If a person is focused on the known things, he is veiled from direct attention to the light of knowledge itself and cannot truly perceive it as he should. Distinguishing knowledge (*ilm*) itself from what is known (*maaloom*) is essential for attaining a deep understanding of the light of knowledge. In the continuation of the discussion, relying on this important principle and explaining it, we will address the inherent nature of the light of knowledge.

Experiencing (Ownership) of the Light of Knowledge

In previous discussions, relying on credible traditional (transmitted) evidence, we spoke about the "bestowal" (*tamleek*) or "imposition" (*tahmeel*) of the light of knowledge upon humans. Through this bestowal or imposition, the essence of the human becomes the owner or bearer of the light of knowledge; we also refer to this ownership as the "possession" (*waajidiyyat*) of the light of knowledge. Now, we wish to provide an experiential explanation of this ownership or possession, whose clarification has a significant impact on a deeper understanding of the discourse on knowledge.

We begin the discussion by posing the question, "When do we truly find ourselves to be 'knowledgeable'?" We can also raise this question in relation to finding ourselves to be "rational". In the latter case, one can say that a person considers themselves rational when they acquire the ability to comprehend the rational good and bad. This ability is also how they recognize others as rational, distinguishing rational adults from children and the insane. The source of this ability is nothing but possessing the "light of intellect", which every rational person finds within themselves. However, possessing the light of intellect does not necessarily mean that this light is directed toward a specific concept.

When we consider someone rational, we are not concerned with whether he possesses a specific rational understanding or not. We do not call someone rational on account of the existence of specific concepts in his mind. The criterion is that he possesses a light through which he "**can**" understand rational good and bad, and this ability itself is the basis of his being considered rational—whether this light is directed toward a specific concept or not. It is even possible that he may be unaware of which rational concepts he can understand; this lack of awareness does not pose an issue for him being rational.

Exactly the same applies to possessing the light of knowledge. Among the most obvious forms of our knowledge are our sight and hearing. Sight means the ability to see, and hearing means the ability to hear, and the criterion for possessing this knowledge is having these abilities. In contrast, someone who lacks these abilities is considered lacking in the light of knowledge. A blind person is someone who cannot see, and a deaf person is someone who cannot hear. Thus, in attributing sight and hearing to a person, it is not necessary for them to have actual visible or audible objects before them. When we consider someone to be sighted, we are not concerned with what things they have seen or will see, nor do we call them sighted based on their visible objects, but simply on whether they can see or not; the same applies to hearing. In this way, each of these senses, for the one who possesses them, is an instance of the light of knowledge.

In general, possessing the light of knowledge does not depend on what knowledge we have but on whether we have the capacity to have knowledge. We regard a blind person as lacking the light of sight because he cannot see anything, and we regard a deaf person as lacking the light of hearing because he does not have the ability to hear anything. Likewise, we do not consider walls, wood, or stone as possessing the light of knowledge because we do not find them capable of becoming knowledgeable. Therefore, the criterion for possessing the light of knowledge is not the presence of knowledge within the knower but solely the capacity to become knowledgeable. To illustrate this concept, "**power**" in humans serves as a good analogy.

When and by what criterion do we consider ourselves "capable", meaning possessors of power? Is it necessary for power to be directed toward a specific act? The answer is clear: We find ourselves capable because we can do as well as refrain from certain actions. At the same time, we may

neither be performing those actions nor refraining from them. We mention both action and inaction because that power must always bear both options. Assuming power with only one side is incompatible with its reality. We consider someone capable of walking if he can either walk or refrain from walking; in other words, both choices (walking and not walking) must be available for him. It is by this criterion that we affirm or deny "power" in someone. For example, a paralyzed person is not considered to possess the power to walk or not walk, so we do not consider him to have power.

Therefore, it is not necessary for our power to be directly applied to an action or inaction for us to consider ourselves possessors of it. We might not even be in a situation where we must perform or refrain from an action. In such a case, if, given the necessary conditions, we can either perform or refrain from that action, we still consider ourselves "capable" in that moment. For instance, someone who is eating food is, at that same moment, capable of performing prayer. This is because he has the ability, at that time, to stop eating and begin praying, and it does not matter whether he prays at that moment or not. What matters is that, given the conditions to pray, he can either perform or refrain from it. Therefore, the criterion for being capable is not that a person's power must be directed toward doing or refraining from a specific act[1].

In attributing the perfection of power to us, we aim to negate helplessness or weakness from ourselves, and not to claim that we are necessarily performing a voluntary act—whether performing an action or

[1]Here, by "**refraining**", we mean voluntary "**abstinence**", the opposite of voluntary "**action**". In this case, we cannot say, for example, that when a person is asleep, he is voluntarily refraining from eating, drinking, and walking. Such forms of refraining are not what is intended here.

refraining from an action. For this reason, we do not consider a paralyzed person capable of performing certain actions, because he lacks the ability to perform them, not because he is not actually performing them. Therefore, the criterion for having power is not its application to a specific act or acts. However, whether we use the term “capable” when power is directed toward a specific act or not is a linguistic issue, and affirming or denying it does not change the essence of the matter.

If we want to draw upon the discussion of power to explain knowledge, we can say that the light of knowledge works in a similar way. The criterion for a person being knowledgeable is his possession of the light of knowledge, regardless of whether he has specific knowledge or not. The fact that I do not find myself devoid of awareness and that I see I can know certain things is the basis of my being knowledgeable, whether I want to know something or not, and whether I have specific knowledge or not. Even if I do not seek to understand something, I still find that I can use my intellectual power to comprehend it. This ability itself is a sign of my possession of the light of knowledge, which does not depend on any specific object of knowledge.

An interesting example of this reality is the ability of a Russian teenager, whose eyes reportedly have the power to function like an X-ray, allowing him to see the bones inside anyone's body with precision. According to experts, he can even observe details in bones and joints that are undetectable by X-rays. Interestingly, he says that he can choose to use his eyes like ordinary people whenever he wants, or he can activate this unique ability at will. Which type of sight he uses depends on his own choice[1].

[1]This news was broadcasted by the BBC in January 2004.

Such examples illustrate what it means to possess and own the light of knowledge and its possibility. Although we do not understand the mechanism of this possession, its existence is evident and undeniable. Even if this teenager does not use this unique Allah-given ability for hours, days, or months, and does not see anyone with this special sight, his possession of the essence of that light remains unaffected. The use or non-use of this power does not impact the existence of his extraordinary knowledge. We consider the essence of knowledge to be this very light possessed by a knowledgeable person, whether they use this light to see something known or not.

Here, it is appropriate to distinguish between the two meanings of the words "knowledgeable" (*aalim*) and "knowledge" (*ilm*) in Arabic. What has been discussed so far is that by "knowledge", we mean the light of knowledge, and a "knowledgeable person" is one who possesses this light. However, sometimes the terms "knowledge" and "knowledgeable" are used in situations where this light has illuminated a specific object. To illustrate possession of the light of knowledge, we used the examples of sight and hearing. According to this explanation, the one possessing the light of knowledge is someone who sees and hears.

Now, if this seeing is applied to something—meaning the sighted person uses his ability to see something and does indeed see it—this act of seeing can be considered a form of "knowing" or "becoming knowledgeable" and the person seeing the object is thus considered "knowledgeable" in relation to that object. This meaning of "knowledge" and "knowledgeable" is different from the one we explained earlier. The latter meaning is generally used in a verbal or infinitive form and less often as an agent noun. For example, I say, "I saw" or "I am seeing" where the infinitive is "seeing". These forms (whether verbs or infinitives) all express a form of becoming knowledgeable.

In Arabic, “alema (علم)yalamu (يعلم)ilman (علما)” is used to convey this same meaning. The term “knowledgeable” (*aalim*) is usually not used in this latter sense, but in any case, the essence of being knowledgeable is possessing the light of knowledge, and this latter meaning appears when the light of knowledge is directed toward specific objects. This sense of “knowledge” is typically used with the preposition “of” or “about” as in “knowledge of something” or “knowledgeable about a topic”. However, “knowledge” in the sense of the light of knowledge, is used without any preposition.

A similar usage applies to the words “intellect” (*aql*) and “wise/rational” (*aaqil*). If the light of intellect illuminates a specific object of reason or objects of reason, we use the term "aqala (عقل)yaʿqilu (يعقل)ʿaqlan (عقلا)" in Arabic to refer to this. However, the agent noun form—at least in Persian—is not used in this way. In Persian, we typically do not use the word *aaqil* (rational) to indicate that the light of intellect is directed toward a specific object of reason or objects of reason. Similarly, we do not use the word “intellect” (*aql*) as the infinitive of “aqalayaʿqilu” (to reason).

In Persian, we generally apply “intellect” (*aql*) to the light of intellect itself, and we consider a rational person (*aaqil*) to be someone who possesses this light. Whether or not this light is directed toward specific objects of reason does not affect calling the person who possesses this light rational. Also, unlike *ilm* (knowledge), where we say “knowledge of” something, in Persian we do not use the phrase “becoming rational *of*” something.

These discussions are mostly linguistic and conceptual, but clarifying these points is necessary for a more precise explanation of the topic. One of the points that becomes clear considering this discussion is that in the writings of Mirza Mahdi Isfahani (r.a.), there are two different expressions

used to describe the essence of knowledge. To those unfamiliar with his terminology, this may seem like a form of inconsistency or duality in the main subject.

In explaining the meaning of knowledge, Mirza Mahdi Isfahani (r.a.) sometimes uses the terms *kashf* (uncovering) and *zuhur* (manifestation) and at other times uses the term *maabehi al-kashf wa al-zuhur* (that by which uncovering and manifestation occur). This difference relates to the two meanings of knowledge that were discussed. When he considers knowledge as equivalent to uncovering and manifestation, it pertains to situations where the light of knowledge is directed toward a specific known object, resulting in “knowledge of” that object. “Knowledge of” something is equivalent to the uncovering or revelation of that thing. Thus, knowledge in this sense is identical to uncovering or revelation.

However, when he uses the term *maabehi al-kashf* (that by which uncovering occurs), he is referring to the light of knowledge itself, which is the cause of the manifestation and revelation of things. This distinction pertains to the use of the word “knowledge” in its two meanings and does not indicate inconsistency in Mirza Mahdi Isfahani's (r.a.) words. ...

The Different Levels of Possessing the Light of Knowledge

Another point to consider in discussing the possession of the light of knowledge is that this possession can have different degrees. We can describe these degrees as variations in the intensity and depth of possession. In the previous explanations, we used the example of a Russian teenager who, in addition to normal vision—which all healthy individuals have—can see bones and joints, similar to what is visible with X-rays. In this case, we could say that this young man’s exceptional possession of the light of knowledge is more intense and profound. In a more lenient expression, we might say that

his possession is greater; however, in using these terms, we must be mindful that the light of knowledge is not material or physical, so it does not have quantity or volume in the way physical bodies do.

More precisely, we should say that we are not speaking about the light of knowledge itself, but rather we perceive our own possession of it as more or less, or as weaker or stronger. Another example of this is the ability of certain individuals, like Shaikh Rajab Ali Khayyat (r.a.), who, according to multiple reports, could, through a spiritual focus, become aware of the inner states of individuals or certain events occurring on the other side of the globe and relay them. This light of knowledge, granted to him—though as a divine bestowal—is generally not accessible to most people. Therefore, we can consider that individuals like him possess the light of knowledge to a greater and more intense degree than others who lack this ability.

An important point to consider in this discussion is that the intensification of one's possession of the light of knowledge does not necessarily expand the scope of a person's knowledge. Fundamentally, there is no necessary connection between the increased intensity of possessing the light of knowledge and the addition of knowledge itself. A person with a greater possession of the light of knowledge can acquire more knowledge, but they may choose not to exercise it.

In the example of the Russian teenager, his ability to see things that others cannot serves as a criterion for the intensity of his possession of the light of knowledge. However, he may never exercise this ability, and thus may not gain any new knowledge from it. Similarly, Shaikh Rajab Ali's (r.a.) ability to perceive hidden matters is considered a criterion for a higher and superior knowledge, regardless of whether he uses this ability. We can view such abilities as evidence of a higher level of knowledge in the individual

who possesses them; however, this superiority does not necessarily imply a greater breadth of knowledge.

Therefore, the addition of a person's knowledge is not necessarily an indication of an intensified possession of the light of knowledge. The expansion of knowledge may relate to the greater and more frequent application of the light of knowledge, not necessarily to its intensification.

On the other hand, merely increasing one's knowledge does not lead to an intensified possession of the light of knowledge. The extent to which a person possesses the light of knowledge depends solely on the will and decree of Almighty Allah, who bestows knowledge upon them. However, the breadth of a person's knowledge generally depends on their effort and diligence in applying their light of knowledge. It is Allah's way that the more a person strives, the more his knowledge—in actuality, his information—increases. Each piece of knowledge that a person acquires becomes known to him by Allah's act, yet this divine origin of knowledge does not contradict Allah's general and universal practice. According to what the infallible Imams (a.s.) have said, the more effort one puts into acquiring knowledge, the more one's information will grow.

Additionally, a person's efforts in the path of worshipping Allah can provide the foundation and prelude for an increase in their possession of the light of knowledge. However, the ordinary efforts of people in acquiring knowledge typically result in an expansion of information rather than an intensification of the light of knowledge itself.

One of the statements of Mirza Mahdi Isfahani (r.a.) regarding the varying degrees of knowledge is as follows:

"*However, in divine sciences, knowledge is the light that is manifest in its essence to anyone through whom something can be known or discovered, even if they remain ignorant of the true essence of that thing. Knowledge of a thing has degrees, and control over it lies in the hands of Almighty Allah, Who grants or withholds it according to His will*.[1]"

In the phrase "*knowledge of a thing has degrees*" if by knowledge, we mean the light of knowledge, then the degrees refer to the varying levels of a person's possession of it. In this case, one person might know something, but his understanding may be superficial, while another person, with a more intense possession of the light of knowledge, may have a deeper understanding of the same thing. For example, some people, with a spiritual(*barzakhi*)vision, can also see the inner state and essence of individuals. Having such vision represents a more intense possession of the light of knowledge. In this case, the essence of the light of knowledge remains the same in both instances—the "that by which uncovering occurs" (*maabehi al-kashf*)—but the intensity of possession differs between the two.

If by *knowledge* in the words of the Mirza Mahdi (r.a.), we mean "knowledge of" things, then its degrees refer to the breadth or limitation of a person's information. A higher degree of knowledge means having more information, and the difference in degrees becomes quantitative – meaning that the one who has more knowledge has a greater quantity of information than the one who has lesser knowledge. In both interpretations, it can be said that control over knowledge is in the hands of the Lord, and the phrase accommodates both meanings, although it leans more toward the first meaning.

[1]Abwab al-Huda, Mirza Mahdi Isfahani (r.a.), p. 6

In this regard, we can refer to the divine Prophets and their successors, especially the Pure and Immaculate Ahl-e-Bait (a.s.), who, by Allah's bestowal, possess the highest degrees of the light of knowledge and intellect. Their servitude before Allah is, of course, incomparable to others. Based on transmitted evidence—which should be discussed in its appropriate context – we believe that the source and origin of the light of knowledge, indeed all lights including knowledge and power, are granted by Allah's permission and will to the sacred beings of the Fourteen Infallibles (a.s.). This possession is the basis of theircreative authority (*wilayah takwiniyah*) over all creation.

For this reason, this light is called the *light of wilayah*, and its source, the Fourteen Infallibles (a.s.), has been called *Noor al-Anwaar* (the Light of All Lights). This does not imply that their beings are identical with the light; rather, they are themselves in essence devoid of illumination and are the owners and possessors of the source of all these lights. In terms of the breadth of their knowledge, it can also be said that, should Allah will it, they have no limitations in using the light of knowledge to comprehend all of Allah's creation.

The Light of Knowledge is Distinct from Man's Essence

With the experiential reminders provided about a person's becoming knowledgeable, we can now more readily affirm that the light of knowledge is not intrinsic to the essence of a human being. By essence, we mean the "I" or "self".Anything that constitutes the "thingness" for "I" lies outside the essence of the "I." When we say "I am human" being human is not intrinsic to the essence of "I." Likewise, when we say "I am knowledgeable" being knowledgeable is also not intrinsic to the essence of "I." Similarly, all perfections of "I" are outside the essence of "I" and none are intrinsic to it.

This is the same truth that Mirza Mahdi Isfahani (r.a.) expressed regarding this matter in the following words:

"*Thus, it (the self) is inherently devoid of itself.*[1]"

This expression does not imply that the essence is devoid of itself. No rational person would make such a claim, as it is inherently contradictory. In this statement, the word *essence* (ذَات) is used in two different senses. In the phrase "*by itself*" (بِذَاتِها), *essence* refers to the "I" or "self". However, in the phrase "*for itself*" (لِذَاتِها), *essence* does not refer to the nature of the "I" itself, but rather to a particular "thingness" attributed to the "I," such as humanity. When we call ourselves human, in a lenient expression we might say that humanity is identical to the essence of the self.

Mirza Mahdi Isfahani's (r.a.) point is that, even when we consider humanity to be part of our essence, this essence is not inherently "I." Rather, we are human by virtue of the perfections we have acquired, and we can say that humanity is not intrinsic to the "I." Therefore, Mirza Mahdi (r.a.) did not speak in contradictions.

When philosophers refer to "essence", they mean the human being itself, taking humanity to be identical with the essence of a human. With this assumption, they could never imagine that this essence could lack itself. This assumption would mean that something is not itself, which is a clear contradiction. In the Mulla Sadra's philosophical system, the concept of a "*devoid essence*" is meaningless. If the essence is human, it makes no sense for it to be devoid of humanity by nature.

[1]Ibid., p. 3

The difference between the two perspectives is that, in Mirza Mahdi Isfahani's (r.a.) explanation, the essence is fundamentally the "I" or "self" which possesses no inherent perfections. Such an essence, however, is not accepted in Sadra's philosophy. Based on this reasoning, they argue that if an essence lacks light (for instance, the light of knowledge), it cannot be supposed to later acquire light. For example, a physical body lacks the light of knowledge, and (according to the philosophers' assumption) if it is not inherent to its essence to possess light, then it is impossible for it to gain the light of knowledge.

When corporeality is intrinsic to something, or in other words, when the essence of something is corporeal, then it is impossible for it to become knowledgeable. In Sadra's philosophical system, becoming knowledgeable requires detachment from body and corporeality. Therefore, when corporeality is intrinsic to something, for that thing to become knowledgeable would require the negation of its intrinsic essence, which is impossible. For this reason, philosophers following Mulla Sadra consider Mirza Mahdi Isfahani's (r.a.) view to be contradictory, regarding it as a form of nonsensical or puzzling statement....

This objection arises from an incorrect understanding of the meaning of inherently devoid of light (*muzlim al-zaat*) in the terminology of the late Mirza Mahdi Isfahani (r.a.). We explained that, first of all, as Mirza Mahdi (r.a.) himself explicitly states, what is meant by the human soul is the same thing that we refer to as the "I" or "self". This is what he calls the "essence" of a human.

"*Human soul implies his reality and essence, expressed by the term "I".*[1]"

Secondly, this soul or essence ("I") inherently possesses no perfections; therefore, any "thingness" it attains is through something else (i.e., it is acquired from outside itself).

"*It is something that, through another, is inherently lacking in external light.*[2]"

Thus, if it is corporeal, corporeality is not intrinsic to it; for this reason, its essence does not need to transform to become knowledgeable. Becoming knowledgeable is a perfection that, like corporeality, is bestowed upon the essence of the soul (the "I"), and in this bestowal, everything required for becoming knowledgeable is given to it. Therefore, no change or transformation in the essence of the soul is necessary.

Philosophers, who believe in the originality of existence (*asaalat al-wujud*) and do not acknowledge any reality for the quiddity (*maahiyyat*) even after it comes into existence, consider the existential perfections of anything to be identical with its essence. Therefore, they regard corporeality as intrinsic to "***body***" and since they consider it impossible for a body to become knowledgeable, they conclude that if a body were to acquire knowledge, it would need to shed its corporeality. This implies a transformation of its essence. However, from the perspective of Mirza Mahdi Isfahani (r.a.), the essence of a thing is its quiddity (*maahiyyah*). He does not believe in the primacy of essence but views the existence of a thing, in a way different from

[1]Ibid.

[2]Ibid.

how philosophers conceive it, as external to its essence, just like other perfections. In this way, the essence of a thing does not change with its ascent or descent.

When an ignorant person becomes knowledgeable, their essence does not change. If their essence did change, we could no longer say, in the true sense, that the same ignorant individual became knowledgeable; this is entirely intuitive. Thus, in all changes and transformations of the soul, the essence remains constant, and this unchanging essence accepts existential perfections. It is this same essence that accepts the light of knowledge, and there is no issue if this essence had previously accepted the perfection of corporeality.

It should be noted that the human "spirit" in the teachings of the divine book and prophetic tradition is not immaterial in the philosophical sense. Therefore, when we say that a human with a soul gains knowledge, it does not mean that the person must attain the level of philosophical immateriality to become knowledgeable.

One must also consider that the objection “nothing can accept its opposite, and thus what is intrinsically dark and obscure, cannot be transformed into light and radiance” is fundamentally irrelevant to Mirza Mahdi Isfahani’s (r.a.) perspective. According to his view, essence is inherently devoid of light, and this dark essence never transforms into light but is rather illuminated. A contradiction or change in essence would occur if one claimed that darkness and obscurity were transformed into light and radiance. However, as we have explained, Mirza Isfahani does not make such a claim. His view is that an essence, which by itself lacks light, acquires light and becomes illuminated; thus, the essence is not darkness itself but rather is darkened and does not transform into light—it becomes illuminated. In this explanation, there is no contradiction, and no change in essence has occurred.

Is the statement in philosophy that “a contingent being in its essence becomes necessary through another” an indication that a thing has accepted its opposite or that the essence of the contingent being has undergone a transformation of essence?

From Mirza's (r.a.) perspective, an essence, even while it possesses light and is illuminated, remains inherently dark when considered in itself, because light is not intrinsic to it. Quiddity, by itself, lacks light, and the inherent darkness of essence never transforms into light. This misunderstanding by critics is what has led to the above objection, not Mirza's (r.a.) precise expression.

Regarding the issue of receptivity, in which it is said, “If the soul does not have the capacity to accept light, how can it possess it?” we say that, according to the view of Mirza Mahdi Isfahani (r.a.) – which must be explored in detail in discussions on creation – the essence or nature of the “I” has no aversion to accepting any perfection and is entirely passive. In other words, it accepts any perfection that Allah grants to it and any perfection that Allah wishes to take away from it. The very concept of denying inherent perfections to essence means this. In previous discussions, we explained that no perfection is intrinsic to essence, not even humanity itself. If Allah bestows the perfection of humanity upon an essence, it accepts it, and if He takes this perfection away and grants it characteristics of another species of animal (as in transformation (مسخ)), it still accepts it.

In the philosophical system, when it is said, “bestowals are according to abilities to accept (قابلیت)”,these abilities to accept are understood as the inherent potentials of things, and Allah**must** grant according to them. For example, the essence of a human has the potential and capacity for humanity. Therefore, humanity is intrinsic to it, and the idea of separating it from the

essence of a human is impossible. However, according to the view of Mirza Mahdi (r.a.), essence is receptive to any perfection that Almighty Allah grants it. Essence(quiddity) lacks any inherent potential or capacity.

In summary, essence/quiddity has no inherent perfection and is receptive to any perfection. Since it is, by itself, devoid of light, it is considered inherently dark. If, through something else, it acquires light, it becomes illuminated. The important point is that in both cases, essence is a stable entity: in the first case, lacking perfection, and in the second, possessing it.

Philosophers, who believe in the originality of existence (*asaalat al-wujud*),when explaining a person's acquisition of knowledge, cannot maintain that there is a stable essence which was once ignorant and then became knowledgeable or increased in knowledge; in simpler terms, they cannot assert a fixed essence at all. For this reason, Mulla Sadra, in discussing substantial motion (*harakat al-jauhari*), proposed the concept of a "fluid essence" which has no clear meaning—a topic we will discuss in its proper place.

Here, we briefly note that if the "thingness" of each entity is based on its existence, and if every change and transformation in things involves an intensifying motion within their existence, then with each change and transformation, the reality of the thing itself is altered. Since essence is merely a conceptual construct and a mental derivation of existence, from each existential level of a thing, an essence is abstracted, differing from the essences of other levels. Therefore, the thing cannot possess any stable essence.

To support this point, we refer to Mr. Dinani's statements on the matter:

"*Substantial motion does not imply a transformation of essence; rather, in substantial motion, the mode of existence of a thing changes. In this intensifying motion, each level of intensification has its own specific essence.*[1]"

Therefore, the judgments and attributes that we ascribe to an individual (for example, a person) apply to different individuals. For instance, someone who has committed a sin cannot be held accountable and punished for that wrongdoing in the future (near or distant), because they are constantly changing and transforming. The person who exists in the future has no connection with the individual who committed the sin. These two are not the same in either existence or essence, and there is no continuity of unity between them. Isn't this obvious and self-evident enough to demonstrate the contradiction in Mulla Sadra's view with basic intuition?

Bibliography

Ibn Babawayh Qummi, Muhammad Ibn Ali Ibn Husain. *al-Khisaal*. Qom

Ibrahimi Dinani, Gholamhossein. *Majaraa-e-Fikr-e Falsafidar Islam* (The Story of Philosophical Thought in Islam).

Isfahani, Mirza Mahdi. *Abwab al-Huda*, manuscript preserved in the Astan Quds Razavi Document Centre.

Isfahani, Mirza Mahdi. *Ma'arif-e Kabir*, manuscript preserved in the Astan Quds Razavi Document Centre.

[1]Maajaraa-e-Fikr-e-Falsafidar Islam, Ibrahimi Dinani, vol. 3, p. 431

Kulayni, Muhammad Ibn Yaqub. *Al-Kafi*. Tehran: Dar al-Kutub al-Islamiyyah

Majlisi, Muhammad Baqir. *Bihar al-Anwar*. Tehran: Al-Maktabah al-Islamiyyah.

Sayyid Razi, Muhammad Ibn Husain. *Nahj al-Balagha*, edited by Subhi Salih. Qom

Shirazi, Sadr al-Din Muhammad. *Mafatih al-Ghayb*. Tehran: Mo'assese-ye Motale‘ati-ye Farhangi.